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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03  
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAM-01  
OMB-01 BIB-01 TRSE-00 /060 W

R 271855Z AUG 76  
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6875

[REDACTED] BUENOS AIRES 5626

E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: PINS, PINT, AR  
SUBJECT: PRESS ASSOCIATION DEPLORES GOVT RESTRICTIONS ON MEDIA

021206

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

(☒) Release (☐) Excise (☐) Deny

Exemption(s):

Classify: (☐) In Part (☒) In Full DECLASS CONTROL

(☐) Classify as        (☐) Extend as        (☐) Downgrade to       

Date        Declassify on        Reason       

1. THE ARGENTINE NEWSPAPER OWNERS ASSOCIATION (ADEPA) IN A LENGTHY NOTE TO PRESIDENT VIDELA LAST WEEK (AUG 21) SAID THAT ECONOMIC PRESSURES, ANTI-TERRORISM EFFORTS AND RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF THE PRESS WERE SEVERELY COMPROMISING THE PRESS IN ARGENTINA. IN ITS MESSAGE ADEPA EMPHASIZED THAT THE PRESS SHARES THE GOVT'S AND PUBLIC'S CONCERN OVER THE SUBVERSIVE THREAT, AND THAT IT, TOO, HAS BEEN THE TARGET OF PRESSURES, EXTORTION, TERRORISM AND ASSASSINATION. BUT, IT SUGGESTED, THE GOVT-IMPOSED SELF-CENSORSHIP DID NOT CONTRIBUTE TO THE STRUGGLE AGAINST SUBVERSION; RATHER IT CONTRIBUTED TO THE CLIMATE OF FEAR AND INSECURITY, DISTORTING REALITY, AND COSTING NEWSPAPERS CREDIBILITY AND READERSHIP.

2. NOTING THAT "MANY OFFICIALS DO NOT SEEM TO UNDERSTAND THE ROLE OF THE PRESS IN THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES," THE MESSAGE SAID THAT A FREE PRESS COULD HELP THE GOVT ATTAIN ITS OBJECTIVES. "NOT ONLY IS IT THE PRESS'S FUNCTION TO INFORM, IT IS ALSO THE ONLY CHANNEL BY WHICH THE AUTHORITIES CAN MEASURE PUBLIC REACTION TO ITS PROGRAMS. THERE CAN BE NO DEMOCRACY WHERE THE PUBLIC CANNOT COUNT ON RECEIVING DIVERSIFIED INFORMATION, COVERED AND ANALYZED FROM DIFFERENT POINTS

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OF VIEW." THE LETTER CALLED ON PRESIDENT VIDELA TO MAKE GOOD HIS REMARKS THAT A FREE PRESS WAS ESSENTIAL FOR ARGENTINA'S RECUPERATION AND ASKED THAT HE RESTORE PRESS FREEDOMS.

3. THE MESSAGE DID NOT ELABORATE ON WHAT IS CONSIDERED TO BE THE GREATER COMPLAINT OF THE PRESS, NAMELY ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES STEMMING FROM REDUCED SALES AND SOME GOVT POLICIES. HIGHER OFFICIAL PRICES FOR NEWSPRINT AND OTHER MATERIALS HAVE INCREASED NEWSPAPER COSTS AND CUT READERSHIP DRASTICALLY. THE FAILURE OF THE GOVT TO MAKE GOOD THE PAST DEBTS OF THE OFFICIAL NEWS AGENCY TELAM IS REPORTEDLY DRIVING SOME SMALLER

PAPERS TO BANKRUPTCY. TELAM, EXCLUSIVE DISTRIBUTOR OF STATE PUBLICITY AND ADVERTISING WHICH IS THE MAINSTAY OF MANY PROVINCIAL PAPERS, RAN UP MORE THAN A MILLION DOLLARS OF DEBTS DURING THE PERONIST GOVT. SO FAR, THE MILITARY GOVT IS BALKING AT PAYING. IT IS ALSO INVESTIGATING FORMER TELAM OFFICIALS SUSPECTED OF POCKETING MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN AGENCY FUNDS. FORMER TELAM DIRECTOR IN RIO, CLAUDIO FERREYRA, WAS ARRESTED LAST WEEK (AUG 20) IN BRAZIL AND GOA WILL PROBABLY REQUEST HIS EXTRADITION BACK TO ARGENTINA.

4. RECENT DISTURBANCES AT NEWSPAPER OFFICES ALSO APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN MOTIVATED MORE BY ECONOMIC STRAINS THAN BY POLITICAL DISGRUNTLEMENT. A STRIKE AT THE AFTERNOON CRONICA (AUG 19-20) BY GRAPHICS WORKERS APPARENTLY RESULTED FROM RECENT CUTBACKS IN REDUNDANT STAFF. SECURITY FORCES ON AUG 23 RAIDED THE CRONICA PRINTING PLANT AND ARRESTED PRINTER'S DELEGATE ALFREDO VILLANUEVA, ALTHOUGH IT WAS NOT MADE CLEAR WHETHER HIS ARREST WAS CONNECTED WITH THE EARLIER STRIKE.

5. INCIDENTS BETWEEN THE PRESS AND MILITARY GOVT HAVE ACTUALLY BEEN REMARKABLY FEW. RELATIVELY FEW JOURNALISTS HAVE BEEN ARRESTED AND MOST OF THESE WERE SUBSEQUENTLY RELEASED. MOST NOTABLE ARE THE CASES OF TWO DIRECTORS OF ULTIMA HORA (NOW RENAMED CRONICA) WHO WERE ARRESTED FOR LESS THAN TWO WEEKS IN LATE JULY FOR PRECIPITOUSLY PUBLISHING THE DEATH OF MARIO SANTUCHO BEFORE THE INFORMATION HAD BEEN OFFICIALLY RELEASED BY THE ARMY. PRESS GUIDELINES ISSUED BY THE GOVT IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE MARCH 24 COUP FORBODE ANY MENTION OF TERRORIST AND ANTI-TERRORIST OPERATIONS UNLESS OFFICIALLY RELEASED BY THE

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MILITARY.

6. IN BUENOS AIRES, ONLY ONE JOURNALIST IS KNOWN TO BE MISSING. HUGO DEMARCHI, A RELATIVELY UNKNOWN REPORTER RECENTLY FIRED FROM CRONISTA COMERCIAL WAS KIDNAPPED AUG 10. CASES OF MISSING AND ARRESTED JOURNALISTS ARE MORE FREQUENT IN THE PROVINCES WHERE, IT IS SAID, SOME NEWSPAPER OWNERS DENOUNCE THEIR RIVALS TO THE LOCAL MILITARY IN ORDER TO HURT THE COMPETITION.

7. COMMENT. ADEPA, A CONSERVATIVE, PRESTIGIOUS ASSOCIATION OF WELL OVER A HUNDRED ARGENTINE EDITORS AND PUBLISHERS HAS, WITH ITS OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT, PUT ITSELF ON RECORD AGAINST GOVT RESTRICTIONS ON PRESS FREEDOMS. THE CREDIBILITY ISSUE IT RAISES WAS PERHAPS OVERPLAYED; THE ARGENTINE PRESS WAS NOT NOTED FOR ITS OBJECTIVITY IN THE PAST, AND IT IS GENERALLY CONCEDED THAT THE PRESS IS CONSIDERABLY MORE WORRIED ABOUT ITS PRECARIOUS FINANCIAL SITUATION THAN OVER THE ISSUE OF FREEDOM OF THE PRESS. NEVERTHELESS, ADEPA IS CLEARLY CONCERNED WITH THE PRESS'S ABBREVIATED ROLE AND THE PROFESSIONAL EMBARRASSMENT OF KOWTOWING TO THE MILITARY. "THE PRESS IS FACED WITH AN IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION," REMARKED ONE PRESS OBSERVER. "IT CANNOT PRINT HAPPENINGS THAT ANYONE CAN PICK UP OVER THE POLICE RADIO." CHAPLIN

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